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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the structure, curriculum pattern, teaching strategies, and program impact of a teacher education program designed for minority students preparing to teach handicapped children. (CL)

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INTENT, ACTION AND EFFECT: TRAINING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN A HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE

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Abstract

The establishment of a teacher education program in special education at South Carolina State College necessitated three vital decisions which were concerned with how the curriculum was to be structurally organized, under what requirements the curriculum was to be formed, and by what administrative decisions the curriculum was to adhere.

The program structure and organization will be described. Focus will be placed on teaching strategies and field experiences that are fundamental to the training aspects of the program. This paper will present a blending curricular approach designed to meet the needs of minority students who are preparing to teach handicapped children. The writer does not suggest "special training" for these students but merely implies that priority was given to guidelines for the development of the curriculum, its content, and its methodology.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The special education program at South Carolina State College was inaugurated 1956 with a series of summer workshops for inservice teachers in the area of mental retardation. By 1965, the program had begun to offer courses for both inservice and preservice teachers, which would enable the teachers to meet State requirements for certification. During that time, only 18 credit hours were required for certification in South Carolina. By 1969-70 the special education curriculum in the College had expanded. This expansion provided preservice teachers an opportunity to earn a minor in the area of mental retardation–a total of 27 credit hours.

By 1970, several remarkable advances had been made on the local, state and national levels in the education of handicapped children. These advances raised many challenging issues regarding the preparation of professional personnel. Teacher preparation became one

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of the critical issues. What were the implications for training programs? With the increased need for quality teachers, would programs provide the kind of training necessary to meet the challenges? These and many other questions were raised. As a result, we thought that it was necessary to evaluate the scope, content, and orientation of our teacher education program in special education. We had to determine what changes were necessary in order to better serve our prospective teachers for the mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed and learning disabilities. Therefore, in response to the growing need for better trained teachers, the special education program in the College was carefully re-examined.

We began to re-examine our teacher education program in light of the changing social needs, teaching behaviors and learning, keeping the goal of education in mind. There was wide agreement that, although some fundamental values and objectives of our program would remain the same, the changing nature of public school programs in South Carolina and the educational provisions for the handicapped needed to be considered in our planning. We felt that fundamental to the purpose of revitalizing our teacher education program, there was a concern for continual development of a quality program which would meet the educational needs of students both within and outside the state of South Carolina.

Plans for reorganizing the program began in 1970-71. Committees were established, composed of faculty, students and administrators from the College. These committees were charged with providing input on the essential elements necessary for the revitalized teacher education program. In addition, curriculum consultants, in and outside the State were brought in to share their views as related to the program. The committees' input coupled with the other valuable deliberations and further planning, resulted in the development of a teacher education program which provides effective preparation to students who are entrusted with meeting the challenges of the times.

South Carolina State College prepares competent teachers on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Because of time constraints, only the undergraduate program will be discussed in this paper.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

A program of studies leading to the Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education was initiated August 1975 in the Department of Habilitative Sciences. This program provides: 1) an ordered sequence of courses; 2) a specialized body of knowledge in addition to the general education requirements; 3) opportunities to develop skills in teaching children with special needs; 4) experiences in a variety of educational settings for handicapped children to enhance the students' knowledge and attitudes; and 5) an opportunity to earn a degree in Special Education with emphasis in one or more disability areas.

The program is designed to produce graduates who will meet the requirements for certification in South Carolina as teachers of the mentally handicapped, the emotionally disturbed and learning disabilities. In addition, the program provides academic and practica experiences needed to prepare students to work with exceptional children and youth in a wide range of situations, e.g. public schools, residential facilities, vocational training centers, sheltered workshops and day care centers. Our graduates qualify for employment in South Carolina as well as other states.

CURRICULUM PATTERN

The program curriculum consists of a total of 121-134 semester hours: 46-53 credits in general education; 33 credits in specialized content; 37 credits in professional education courses and experiences; and 12 credits in free electives.

Students who desire to pursue the B.S. degree in Special Education, enter the program during their freshman year. The basic requirements of students qualifying for a bachelor's degree are as follows: a) successful completion of the required courses in general education and professional education; b) completion of the requirements within a specific area of preparation; c) successful completion of the required pre-clinical and professional clinical experiences; and d) successful completion of a minimum of 121 semester hours with a cumulative quality-point ratio of at least 2.00.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Each component of our program contains objectives and criteria for their achievement. A series of instructional units and modular experiences, skills that are essential to effective teaching, behavioral objectives, educational diagnosis, behavior management, individual educational planning, micro-teaching and audio-video techniques are emphasized. The prospective teacher must be able to successfully meet the pre-established performance criteria of each component. The measurable outcomes of each component is the prospective teacher's proficiency in demonstrating his mastery of the requisite teaching skills.

Emphasis is placed on the knowledge that a teacher should possess in each component, the behavioral skills a teacher should be able to demonstrate and the teacher's ability to bring about desired changes in their students. To ensure that a prospective teacher is able to operationalize that knowledge and develop skills in teaching, much of the training takes place in the schools where he or she works with students in classroom situations. All prospective teachers are exposed to working with students during their freshman, sophomore and junior years, rather than the senior year only. We stress early exposure in actual classroom teaching situations to provide realistic and relevant training opportunities.

Field Based Experiences

We utilize a variety of settings in local and state public schools as well as other state facilities for the handicapped. These sites provide the prospective teacher opportunities to engage in pre-clinical and professional clinical experiences.

Pre-clinical experiences refer to those teaching and/or field experiences that are required of freshman, sophomore and junior level students. Professional clinical experiences, formerly called directed teaching or student teaching are required of senior level students, where they assume the role of a teacher in a given classroom.

Pre-clinical experiences, an integral part of the program are conducted on a semester basis for periods of four to six weeks, twice weekly for two to three hours per session. These experiences provide students practice in relation to theory acquired in introductory courses,

methods, diagnostic assessments, and management. All prospective teachers are required to work with students in the regular classes and classes for the handicapped.

Our program emphasizes continuous work with children. Thus, during the senior year, the prospective teacher engages in the professional clinical teaching for nine to twelve weeks consecutively with handicapped children or youth. Both the pre-clinical and clinical teaching are monitored and supervised by the public school cooperating teachers and the college supervisors. Students' progress and competencies are evaluated jointly by instructors, on-and-off-campus supervisors, and student self-reports.

The special education program at South Carolina State College is geared to community involvement. The prospective teachers work with parents of the handicapped in a variety of situations. Throughout the program, a number of parents have been invited to the College to talk informally with students who are preparing to teach handicapped children. Moreover, our students work with the parents in their homes and with parent organizations in the communities. Many of these parents have expressed a great deal of concern about the educational programs and facilities provided for their handicapped children.

Through observations, interviews and counseling parents of the handicapped, our prospective teachers have been able to gain first-hand information about the feelings and attitudes parents possess toward their children.

The concerns expressed by parents established channels of communication which allowed for input into our teacher training program and feedback as well.

Seminars and Conferences

Seminar sessions are usually held periodically to discuss problems, methods, techniques, evaluation of pupils, and program improvements. In addition, resource persons from the community, in and out of the State and the State Department of Education served as consultants.

A series of conferences with students and instructional personnel in the program provided insights as to where the strengths and weaknesses lie. The faculty and students work together in identifying problems and solving the problems.

PROGRAM IMPACT

South Carolina State College has become one of the major institutions in the State for educating teachers to work with handicapped children and youth. The majority of both undergraduates and graduates who have completed the program are helping to meet the needs of the handicapped in numerous school districts throughout the State. The program provided students and teachers training that enabled them to deal effectively with learning and social problems in the classroom. The substantive content and experiences to which the students were exposed in the program enhanced their effectiveness as teachers.

To objectively evaluate the preparation of special education teachers who completed our program, a survey was made which obtained inputs from the graduates themselves and their employers.

The program has generated a keen interest in our undergraduate students to work with handicapped persons and with their peer groups on problems which involve handicapped individuals. This was evidenced by an increase in membership of the Student Council for Exceptional Children and its planned activities.

Federal funding provided more of our students the opportunity to enroll in the special education program. As a result, the overall enrollment has increased significantly. In addition, the grants afforded the kind of financial assistance which allowed our program to be exposed to a number of noted lecturers and consultants who shared their expertise and experiences with our students.

A new and emphatic dialogue between all disciplines concerned with the preparation of teachers in the College has been established. Special Education is now taken very seriously by the College as a whole and the entire community. Our special education program has created a "partnership" of concern, maintaining effective communication in view of improving teaching and learning.

CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence, much of it is found in predominately Black colleges, that minority students can achieve, if we as educators are serious about teaching them. If students with economic, academic, and cultural limitations are to succeed in their school experiences, education must be realistic for them. The motivational approaches must be carefully planned. Means as well as ends must be considered. We believe that learning is influenced by either the presence or absence of intrinsic motivation in the curriculum. The teacher nor the student can create interest through dull unrealistic assignments. Further, learning is influenced by the student's cultural motivation, his degree of interest and drive as stimulated by school experiences. This includes experiences gained through teachers, peers, and the community.

The educational goals for minority students are the same as for all students. Likewise, minority students vary in achievement from poor to superior. Therefore, every possible effort is made to help our students feel that they are capable individuals, who are worthy of an education and that they can become effective teachers in the real world.